

Ukraine-EU: Will We Be Together?

(By Svitlana Kononchuk, Political Program Head, UCIPR)

On May 1, 2004, the European Union celebrated the accession of 10 new Members. 455 million Europeans were united in the EU by shared common principles and values... Inspired and enthusiastic Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians were unwilling to return to years of the Communist regime... Fireworks, concerts, holidays, festival of the European spirit... We, Ukrainians, remember well these spring days. We remember our mixed emotions: joy for our friends on the one hand and regret that we were not together on the other. Today, the United Europe has a new social agreement on the agenda based on freedom, democracy and respect for human dignity. New EU Member States have transited to Shenghen visa, which means freedom of movement as one of the fundamental freedoms.

Ukraine is just preparing to adopt instruments (in the given case, the European Neighborhood Policy) suggested by the EU. Our country is on the threshold of the struggle for redistribution of power, in which citizens will play secondary roles.

In this respect, the importance of the question of how parties, participating in the early parliamentary elections, view Ukraine's European choice is increasing, since we, Ukrainians, still believe in the spirit of freedom.

Analysis of platforms of political forces presented in their election programs, articles and speeches of leaders allows concluding that theses about Euro-integration have nothing in common with other ideas. And sometimes, they even conflict with each other.

Specifically, in 2006, Lytvyn's Bloc declared its intention to do everything "to ensure Ukraine's authoritative presence in all international organizations – regional, sub-regional, continental and world's ones, participation in which is necessary and useful for our country." Yet, in 2007, the Bloc declares another category that has nothing in common with the European Union – "inadmissibility of sale of agricultural land".

Certainly, some parties resolutely oppose Euro-integration, like Nataliya Vitrenko's Progressive Socialist Party, which regularly predicts Ukraine's apocalypses in case of the EU interest in our state. "We are very much against the accession to the World Trade Organization and the European Union! It will kill the national economy. Having opened the domestic market for world's giants, transnational corporations, we will ruin Ukraine's depressed industry and agriculture. European prices for foodstuffs and necessities will increase the number of the impoverished. We will not receive from the European Union raw materials and energy necessary for the Ukrainian economy, whereas our goods are not competitive on the European markets. In the EU, Ukraine will face mass unemployment, cultural and spiritual slavery."

Refutation of the above mottos is unlikely worth the effort. The only thing that must satisfy adherents of Euro-integration is Nataliya Vitrenko's oath that in a new parliament, her faction will not back up a pro-governmental coalition because of their different positions on positive-negative consequences of Ukraine's entry to the EU and the WTO. In the last year, when Yanukovych's government had the stable

support of the parliamentary majority, the main body of laws in support of Ukraine's accession to the WTO was passed (in 2006 and 2007, the Verkhovna Rada adopted 22 and 11 laws in this direction respectively). There must be no doubt that either the Party of Regions (Victor Yanukovych) or Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defense Bloc (Yuriy Lutsenko) or Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc, which one way or another will work in the legislature soon, formally share the position on Ukraine's EU membership. "Paper" theses of their program documents resemble each other, though BYuT makes a stronger emphasis on the need to develop alternative sources of energy. These political forces undoubtedly differ in goal attainment tactics and activity practice. Though the above three forces are potential winners of the upcoming elections because in this case, what matters is not their vision of Euro-integration but the unity of a would-be parliamentary majority and government. Anyway, forecasting Ukraine's behavior on the international scene, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the Ukrainian political system, i.e. the system of decision-making, requires joint participation of the Head of State, the parliament and the government in policy development. The Verkhovna Rada formulates principles of domestic and foreign policies, while the President governs foreign policy and his position determines the country's course on the whole. Acting President Victor Yushchenko has not given up the idea of joining the European Union. Furthermore, it is a common knowledge that the President presents the government with a candidature to the office of Foreign Minister.

The Green Party (Volodymyr Kosterin) pursues traditionally sound policy based on principles of democracy and European nature-friendly practice. Prioritizing power decentralization and development of "real" self-government, the Green Party approaches the ideals of not a party-oligarchic but civil society and, what is important, the European vision of public management. The Greens, for whom the quality of civil life is above all, are sure that Ukraine must be an integral and equal member of the European Community. It has to be stated that the EU Lisbon Strategy, like documents of the Green Party of Ukraine, is based on the idea of sustainable development. And despite the fact that the Party will unlikely be elected to the parliament of the 6th convocation, its consistent participation in socio-political life may offer the Greens and their supporters an opportunity of active and effective policy. For the society, it is important that parties with clear ideological platforms will work in the area of politics.

Ludmyla Suprun's Bloc is close to the European practice of public management as well. It advocates decentralization of public governance and the local self-government reform.

The position of the Union Svoboda (Freedom) (Oleg Tyahnybock) that advocates the idea of national justice is interesting enough. Being supported by a small number of voters throughout Ukraine, the Union has many adherents in western regions, i.e. those, who share the thesis that "Ukraine's membership in the EU will enable Ukrainians to live by the highest standards, widely use civilization achievements and freely move around the world." The party also promises "to educate about advantages of the European choice." Consequently, the Foreign Ministry will have its active agitator and propagator.

The Socialist Party (Oleksandr Moroz) is pro-European but it will hardly explain

drastic changes being part and parcel of the 2006-2007 political crisis to its European colleagues. Also, there is an opinion that such explanations will be given unofficially.

At the end of the brief review of positions of Ukrainian political forces, I would like to say I am sure that in a year or two (over the period before the presidential elections of 2010), Ukraine's nominal directive towards joining the EU will not change. In the framework of progress made in the Ukrainian legislation there will be no return. Yet, Ukrainians must answer a number of questions, whose solution is a key to potential membership in the European Union. These questions are dilemmas: whether the Ukrainian political class will agree with the need for democracy; whether it will continue removing the society from the formation of power; whether it is ready to create equal and transparent conditions for all market entities; whether it will continue to apply tactics of support (especially, public) to some businesses; what taxation policy will serve as a basis for social leveling as a guarantee against stratification and division of the country into "two nations"; what public management is Ukraine capable of; to what extent public governance is effective and many-many other questions.

I am ready to hear that I am not a patriot but will, nevertheless, ask how long will it take us to start?

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